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THE STORY OF THE CALABASH-TREE IN THE "POPOL VUH."¹

THE two brother wizards Hun-hun-ahpu and Vucub-hun-ahpu were condemned to death by the rulers of the nether world, Hun-came and Vucub-came, on their visiting them, inasmuch as they did not succeed in passing through the ordeals to which they were subjected. . . . "That is sufficient," said Hun-came and Vucub-came, "now your days are accomplished! Ye shall die the death! Ye shall cease to exist! Ye shall be rent in pieces and your countenances shall be hid here in this place!" They were, therefore, hewn in pieces and buried on the spot whereupon the ashes were wont to be cast. But ere that took place, the head of Hun-hun-ahpu was severed from his body and placed, by order of Hun-came and Vucub-came, between the two main branches of a dry tree by the wayside. Thereupon the tree began to blossom and bear fruit, and the fruit thereof is what we now call "jicaras." Hun-came and Vucub-came were mightily astonished at the wonder that had taken place. Round fruits were to be seen all along the branches, and shortly it was impossible to distinguish Hun-hun-ahpu's head from the other fruits on the tree. It took the shape of a calabash. All those who dwelt in the nether regions went out to behold the marvel. The tree was very highly esteemed and prized, for in a moment of time, on their depositing the head of Hun-hun-ahpu in the fork of the tree, it had received life, and they said among themselves: "Do not pluck the fruit of the tree! Do not walk beneath this tree!" Such was the determination of all those who dwell in the nether regions. Now a young girl heard the story of the miracle that had happened. We are now about to narrate how it was that she went to the spot where the tree stood.

Herein is narrated an account of a young virgin, the daughter of a great lord of the name of Cuchumaquic.

A young girl, the daughter of a great lord, Cuchumaquic by name, and of a woman of the name of Xequic (blood), heard, her father speak about the marvellous tree. Astonished at what she had heard she exclaimed: "Why should I not go down to see the tree they are talking about; for, in truth, what they relate is very strange and delightful." She went there straightway alone and went up to the foot of the tree, which was just opposite the place where the ash-heap lay. On seeing it she exclaimed in astonishment: "What beautiful fruits, and how very fruitful the tree is! I surely shall not die, shall not perish, if I take one of these fruits." Then the skull fixed between the branches spoke

¹ Translated by C. V. Hartman from *Las Historias del Origen de los Indios de Guatemala*, por el R. P. F. Francisco Ximenes, publ. 1856 by Dr. C. Scherzer, in Vienna.

and said: "What do you want? These round things are only bones of the dead, but perchance you desire them nevertheless." "Yes," answered the girl, "I should like to have one of those fruits." "Stretch out your right hand," said the skull. "Gladly," said the girl, stretching up her right hand towards the skull. The skull thereupon spat right in the middle of her hand. The girl immediately drew back her hand and looked into it, without, however, observing a single trace of the spittle of the skull. "I have given you a sign," said the skull, "in my spittle and slaver; this head of mine will never speak any more, for it is only bone; there is no flesh left here. The same shall be the fate of all mighty men whoever they may be. . . . They are only honored for the sake of their flesh, and when they die human beings are terrified at the skull, and its progeny is as spittle and slaver. But if they be children of a wise and clever man, the being of the wise man is not terminated but passes to the sons and daughters he has engendered. My being has now passed into you. Rise from the realms of the dead to the earth, in order that you may not die."

So spoke the head of Hun-hun-ahpu. That was the word of wisdom and the message of Huracan, of Chipacaculha and Raxacaculha, and in accordance with their orders it was done. Then the young girl returned to her home, after hearing many words of counsel and messages. In a short time she was conscious of being with child as a result of what was only spittle.¹ The children who were born were Hun-hun-ahpu and Xbalanque. Six months afterwards the girl's father became aware of her being with child, and she was severely reprimanded by him.

¹ The idea of spittle being endowed with generative power occurs extensively even amongst the North American Indians. Remembering having observed this idea mentioned in one of the legends published by Dr. G. A. Dorsey, I communicated with him, and he very kindly furnished me with the following instances, which I here quote:—

Saliva drops into girl's mouth and she becomes pregnant. (Hoffman, *Flathead Indians*, p. 27.)

Baby comes from spittle. (Curtin, *Creation Myths*, p. 348.)

Man spat upon girl's stomach and she became pregnant. (Farrand, *Quinault Traditions*, p. 124.)

Lynx spits on girl and so she becomes pregnant. (Teit, *Thompson River Indians*, p. 37.)

From Dr. A. B. Lewis of Columbia University I have obtained another quotation from Curtin's *Creation Myths*, p. 300:—

"'My grandmother,' said he in the night, 'I may not come back to-morrow. If anything happens, the bow and the quiver and all that are with them will fall on the bed. You will know then that some one has killed me. But a child will rise from the spittle which I have left near the head of the bed; a little boy will come up from the ground.' . . .

"In the middle of the fourth night she heard crying on the ground near Tsawandi Kamshu's sleeping place. A little baby was crying, rolling, struggling, wailing. . . . The old woman went to the spot where the crying was, looked, found a baby covered with dirt, mud, and ashes. . . . 'I don't think any one brought that baby into this house,' said the old woman to herself. 'Tsawandi Kamshu said that a baby would come from the ground, would rise from his spittle. Maybe this is his spirit that has come back and is a baby again.' "

Then assembled in the council-chamber Hun-came, Vucub-came, and Cuchumaquic. The last named said: "My daughter is with child by reason of her dishonorable ways of life." So spoke Cuchumaquic, when he stepped forward before his masters. "That is sufficient," they replied; "subject her to cross-examination, that she may confess and we may hear what she has to say in her defence." "Good, noble lords," he replied, and thereupon at once asked his daughter: "Whose is the child thou hast in thy womb?" She replied: "I am not with child, O my father! No man hath ever approached unto me." "Thou hast brought dishonor upon thyself," was the father's answer. "Come hither now and carry her away to be sacrificed, and then bring me her heart in a calabash." This command was given to the owls, who were four in number. They went straightway and brought a calabash, carried away the girl, taking with them a sharp knife to cut her asunder with. The girl then said to those who had been sent: "Kill me not, for I have not done any wrong, for the fetus I have in my womb came there of itself; what happened was this: I went out to divert myself by beholding the marvel that had taken place with regard to Hun-hun-aphu's head on the ash-heap; do not therefore put me to death!" The messengers replied: "Well, then, what are we to take with us in the calabash instead of your heart? Did not our masters order that it was to be placed in this calabash? We would gladly set you at liberty." "Good," said she. "This heart does not belong to them, . . . it shall not be burnt in their sight; put in the calabash the fruit of this tree," said the girl, and the sap of the tree was red. The sap was tapped into the calabash, and at once it coagulated and formed a round ball. And the hardened sap was placed in the calabash instead of the heart, and in color it was red as blood . . . and this tree is called "granapalo colorado" or the blood tree.